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SUBJECT: WHA DAS DAVID ROBINSON MEETS WITH HAITIAN
OFFICIALS ON ELECTIONS, DISASTER RELIEF

REF: STATE 118278

Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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¶1. (C) Summary: Deputy Assistant Secretary David Robinson, accompanied by WHA/CAR Deputy Director Willard Smith, met November 20 with key Haitian officials to discuss the country's preparations for the upcoming senatorial elections, a possible donor conference in early 2009 in Canada, and ongoing disaster relief efforts. Embassy officers and senior MINUSTAH officials also briefed DAS Robinson on U.S. hurricane relief, security, border issues, and counter-narcotics efforts. End summary.

PRESIDENT'S CHIEF OF STAFF

¶2. (C) Fritz Longchamp, Chief of Staff to President Rene Preval met November 20 with DAS Robinson, Ambassador and DepDir Smith at the National Palace. Longchamp told DAS that preparations for senatorial elections are well underway, but the series of parliamentary and local elections foreseen by the Haitian constitution is too costly and cumbersome. In particular, he stated, it is unlikely that Haiti can organize a second round of elections for both the Senate and Chamber of Deputies in late 2009 as required by the constitution. Longchamp said a team of advisors to President Preval is working on proposals to change the constitution, adding that there was a broad consensus that many aspects of the constitution must be changed.

¶3. (C) In response to DAS Robinson's query regarding the modalities of any constitutional changes, Longchamp demurred, saying only that the amendment process prescribed by the current constitution is unworkable. (Note: The 1987 Constitution requires that two successive legislatures approve any amendments by a two-thirds majority in each house. End note.) Longchamp added that the question of how to change the constitution is complicated by the fact that the current constitution prohibits referenda. Longchamp and DAS Robinson also discussed the election of Barack Obama as President; DAS Robinson told Longchamp that although Obama's recent election as President was a historic event, it would likely not signal dramatic changes in USG policy toward Haiti.

¶4. (C) Ambassador raised the issue of no-action motions in the UN General Assembly's Third Committee on human rights resolutions concerning Iran, Burma, and the DPRK (reftel). Longchamp defended Haiti's practice of abstaining on

no-action motions even when it supports the underlying resolution, noting Haiti's longstanding dispute with Canada, which he identified as a key sponsor of the resolutions. (Note: Former Haitian Prime Minister Jacques-Edouard Alexis was held up at the border while seeking entry to Canada in 2006, reportedly due to Alexis's supposed complicity in human rights abuses during his first term in office. End note.) Ambassador urged Longchamp to look past Haiti's disagreement with Canada and evaluate the resolutions on their merits.

MINISTER OF PLANNING

15. (C) DAS Robinson met with Minister of Planning and External Cooperation Jean-Max Bellerive to discuss international relief efforts in the wake of recent hurricanes and the possibility of an upcoming donor conference. Bellerive said that plans for a donor conference were not finalized and the conference would likely not take place before March 2009. He said the Haitian government preferred that the conference be held abroad, in order to avoid unduly raising Haitian expectations for a quick solution to longstanding problems of poverty and poor infrastructure. He added that every January after the Christmas holidays and before the annual February carnival, tensions and pressure on the government increases, particularly if the GOH fails to announce a major new initiative that would improve the lives of Haitian citizens. Holding the conference in Haiti would neither be fruitful for the GOH nor donors.

16. (C) Asked to assess ongoing hurricane relief efforts,

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Bellerive said aid efforts have advanced, but much work remains to be done. He said USG assistance in the health field has been particularly successful, but Haiti's own efforts could be more transparent and better coordinated. Bellerive said he understood the international community's aversion to direct budget support, but hoped international donors would be willing to select projects from a ''menu'' of GOH-proposed options that the GOH would not be able to fund due to budget shortfalls.

17. (C) Bellerive moved to a frank discussion of challenges facing Prime Minister Michele Pierre-Louis. He said the Cabinet looks to the PM to play a strong role in improving internal coordination with the President, the PM, Cabinet ministers and the Parliament. Bellerive opined that the Cabinet considers the PM's ''honeymoon period'' as essentially over. He added that the time has come for the PM to start pushing for important reforms and prioritizing her policies to provide clearer direction to her Cabinet.

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

18. (C) In a meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs Alrich Nicolas, DAS Robinson recalled positive Haitian reaction to Barack Obama's election. Nicolas concurred, noting that the historic election of Obama is a lesson in democracy which resonates throughout the world and one in which Haitians take great pride. At the same time, he said, expectations of the President-elect are high. In response to Nicolas's concerns about whether the new administration will introduce policy changes that might affect the U.S.- Haiti relationship, DAS Robinson reiterated it was unlikely there will be a ''sea change'' in policy. That said, he added, Haiti must continue to remain communicative, frank and forward-leaning in its diplomatic engagement with the new administration. Nicholas agreed and said he had already relayed the same message to Haiti's Ambassador in Washington.

19. (C) Ambassador told Nicolas that in an earlier meeting, she spoke to Chief of Staff Longchamp about the USG's hope that Haiti would vote for the proposed UN resolutions regarding human rights issues in Iran, Burma, and North

Korea. Ambassador stated that while it is clear the visa situation that occurred with former PM Alexis remains an issue, she urged the government of Haiti to put the issue with the Canadians aside and vote with the U.S. on this critical human rights issue.

¶10. (C) In a final meeting at MINUSTAH Headquarters, Deputy Special Representative to the UN Secretary General Luis Da Costa provided an overview of the political landscape in Haiti and MINUSTAH's role in bolstering security and helping the GOH overcome instability. He highlighted MINUSTAH's success in advancing three key sector reforms: Police, Justice and the Penal System. He underscored that working daily to build Haiti's national capacity is ''MINUSTAH's exit strategy'' and will be the criteria upon which its departure will be considered.

¶11. (U) DAS Robinson has cleared this cable.
SANDERSON